

Embassy Security: Problems Exist for U.S. Around the World

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WASHINGTON, April 21 — Some of the security problems that have arisen at the American Embassy in Moscow are present in a number of other American missions around the world, according to Administration officials, intelligence experts and current and former American ambassadors.

Missions in China, Eastern Europe and other areas with a large Soviet presence have been particularly vulnerable, American security officials said. But they said there were also problems in certain Middle Eastern and African countries.

Americans serving in friendly countries where internal security regulations are more relaxed are also susceptible to Soviet and other subversion, they said.

Security lapses elsewhere have not drawn the same attention as those in Moscow, the specialists acknowledged, although many of the problems have existed for decades and are considered as serious. Nor has the attention directed at the problem in Moscow been duplicated elsewhere.

'Problems Are Widespread'

What the incident in Moscow should awaken us to is that the problems and vulnerabilities are widespread," said Adm. Bobby R. Inman, retired, a former Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, who headed a special State Department advisory panel that investigated embassy security in 1985.

"While the Soviets most skillfully exploit them, they are not the only ones trying," he added, "and vulnerabilities are at least as large if not larger in other places where the guard is not so high."

An Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security, Robert E. Lamb, acknowledged that hostile espionage is a global problem confronting United States diplomatic facilities.

"Moscow has a threat level unmatched in the world, but there are other places that are just as vulnerable," he said. "Espionage is a worldwide problem and not confined to just hostile countries."

In discussing security problems in Eastern Europe, the officials said that embassy buildings in Prague, Budapest, East Berlin and Sofia, Bulgaria, are next to buildings that in some cases are owned by the host government. American investigators have turned up evidence of break-ins in buildings in Eastern Europe and electronic bugging.

Outside the Eastern bloc, the least acknowledged but the most serious se-

curity problems are at American facilities in China, according to intelligence officials.

When Senate Foreign Relations Committee investigators visited the three Beijing embassy buildings last year, they discovered a maze of tunnels from the basements to other buildings. Doors to the tunnels were locked but did not have alarms. One tunnel led into the basement of the Czechoslovak Embassy, said one committee staff member who went on the trip.

The consulate in Canton, meanwhile, is considered impossible to protect, since it is situated on several floors of a high-rise hotel and even "secure areas" where only Americans are allowed are guarded by the Chinese police, not American marines.

American installations are also made vulnerable by the extensive use of local employees. While West Germany, France and Britain hire an average of one local employee for every three of its own officials, the average number of local employees at American posts far exceeds the number of Americans.

Last December there were 10,766 Americans and 15,327 local employees working full-time at American posts around the world. In some countries, the difference was dramatic. In Japan, for example, local employees numbered 407, compared with 269 Americans. In France there were 583 local employees and 291 Americans, and in Morocco 268 locals and 96 Americans.

Local employees outnumbered Americans even in some posts in Eastern Europe. In Czechoslovakia, for example, 46 locals worked for 27 Americans, while in Poland there were 119 locals and 52 Americans.

In Moscow, 210 Russians worked at the American Embassy, but all have been withdrawn.

Because of language and cultural barriers, American posts in China employed 336 locals and 155 Americans.

The United States can hire its own local employees in countries with large numbers of Soviet officials, such as Cuba, Nicaragua, Iraq and Syria, but it is assumed that some of them are intelligence agents and that all must report to their governments.

In November 1985, for example, the State Department issued a strong protest when Nicaragua subjected local employees of the American Embassy in Managua to several hours of intense interrogation. American diplomats in both Baghdad, Iraq, and Damascus, Syria, have reported problems with electronic surveillance.

Government investigators assert that the problem of socializing between American embassy staff members and local employees and residents is more widespread than is generally acknowl-

edged by many officials.

"The basic rule, especially in the Eastern bloc, is 'Sleep NATO,' but that's not always followed," a former Foreign Service officer said.

American officials working at the United States Interests Section in Havana and the embassy in Managua have been sent home in recent years after they were caught dating local women. In Havana, investigators believe there was a serious intelligence loss because of an incident three years ago.

It is common practice for the Soviet intelligence services and their surrogates to use their nationals to seduce Americans in countries outside the Eastern bloc, where there is a tendency to be less suspicious and where socializing may not be forbidden.

Bill Would Ban Locals

In many emerging nations, where salaries are low, local employees have been particularly susceptible to offers to spy for Soviet-bloc governments and, to a lesser extent, ostensibly friendly countries.

This month, Representative Jim Courter, Republican of New Jersey, submitted a bill that would ban all local workers from American posts in Eastern Europe.

Although the State Department opposes the bill, it is working on a plan that would eliminate local employees from sensitive areas of American offices in Eastern Europe. It is also investigating regulations that would further prohibit socializing.

Reducing the number of local employees would require budgeting enormous resources to substitute Americans in many jobs. It would also shrink significantly the services offered to Americans abroad.

Locals Called Vital

Extensive renovation or replacement of more than 100 embassies to deter terrorism and espionage, as recommended by the Inman panel, would be even more expensive.

But despite the concern about the widespread use of locals, many diplomats argue that on the whole they benefit the Foreign Service.

They provide valuable services that in some cases could not be duplicated by American contract employees, according to State Department officials. And without local employees, they say, American embassies could turn into closed fortresses with little connection to the populace.

The officials say that native employees know how to resolve problems with local bureaucracies, know the language and dialects and often provide insight into culture and politics.

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'Tremendous Benefits'

"There are tremendous benefits to being surrounded by foreign nationals, and if one is careful the benefits outweigh the liabilities," one Foreign Service officer said.

"There's a lot of sentiment in Congress for building new embassies when you're saving lives, but not for espionage," Mr. Lamb said, referring to the readiness of Congress to make embassies more secure against terrorism. "If this Government is going to make embassy security a priority, this Congress can help."

Mr. Lamb is expected to raise this and other issues in testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Operations on Wednesday.